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Determining Participation Patterns in Medieval Courts Through Charter Witness Lists

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Knowledge about the great and famous is easily obtained. A monarch and his actions are recorded many times over by historians, chroniclers, and poets. Little is known about the men that participated at the king's court. Evidence about the workings of the court and the courtiers can be found in the witness lists of the charters.

The witnesses to royal documents prior to Magna Carta formed the basis for a parliament system. There were three types of charters which were witnessed: Grants, Confirmations, and Writs. These men, by attesting charters agreed to enforce and accept the king's decrees. Furthermore, by attesting to grants, these witnesses may have agreed to help the king provide the property being gifted. Therefore, a system of government evolved whereby the king sought approval for his decrees. It becomes important to know who the courtiers were and how they were allied, because they gradually become an integral part in the government of Great Britain.

C. Warren Hollister (1986, p. 98) in »Magnates and 'Curiales' in Early Norman England« identified the fifteen most frequent lay witnesses of royal charters as 'curiales'. The 'curiales' in the reigns of William I consisted of Norman nobles whose families assisted in the Conquest of 1066. Descendants of William I's 'curiales' continued to attest the royal charters of succeeding kings. Hollister theorizes in his article about the early Anglo-Norman magnates that there is a relationship between court participation and wealth. But this does not explain why the 'curiales' participated together in rebellions against the king or why certain witnesses only appear with certain others. By examining the witness lists of the charters of Richard I., groupings of particular witnesses are illustrated which provide clues to alliance patterns among the 'curiales'.

The witness lists of surviving charters provide the identity of court members but only for the days charters were issued. From the charters issued by Richard I. of England(1), we know that court could be held on any day at any place. We also know by comparing charters to Pipe Rolls that most of the charters issued did not survive. Solely using existing char-

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ter attestations to determine court attendance is unreliable, because of the loss of so many charters and also because one could be at court and not attest. (Hollister, 1986, p. 98) By comparing the witness lists to each other, patterns emerge, providing an outline of political alliances. Repetitions of witnesses also emerge on different dates, suggesting that these witnesses remained at court for a number of days, but did not attest. Therefore, I have developed two programs that illustrate these court participation patterns. RICKPAT.PAS provides the frequency of who attests with whom. The other, WITS.PAS, will list who could have been present at court, based on the available witness lists, for any day. Combining the results of these programs will provide essential clues to who was at court and their importance based on their presence when the king was making governmental decisions.

My programs are written in Pascal. I developed my own programs because of the limitations of statistical packages which do not allow the record manipulation required. The data is entered in a simple text file; the witnesses are coded by number, not name. I chose a text file to facilitate the use of my programs by scholars who are unfamiliar with computers and database programs.

In order to determine grouping patterns among witnesses, I used linked lists keyed by witness number. For each witness, frequencies were tallied for the witness and fellow attestors. The number of times that witness(b) attests with witness(a) provides a key to their alliance. The higher this number, the stronger the alliance. On the missing days or for particular beneficiaries, this pattern should be repeated. Traditional alliances are now shown that have existed between the noble families for generations. (I expect similar patterns to be found during the baronial rebellions against John between 1213 and 1215. This pattern should also be repeated throughout the reign of Henry III and the many rebellions that occurred; any changes among the families should occur after the death of Henry III's regent.)

For days on which few charters or witness lists survived, I wanted to create a hypothetical list of possible court attendants. While the resulting list is not complete, it will be statistically accurate. Adding the most frequent co-attestors as determined by my first program to this hypothetical list will provide a viable list for court attenders, thereby partially filling the gap created by lost documents. The method for determining the hypothetical list of witnesses for my second program is based on SET Operations, which are operational functions of Pascal. The algorithm is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Date}_i < \text{test date} < \text{Date}_j \\ & \text{Date}_i.\text{witnesses} * \text{Date}_j.\text{witnesses} + \\ & \quad \text{test date.witnesses (if present)} = \\ & \quad \text{test date.witnesses (4)} \end{aligned}$$

The remainder of my presentation will be spent showing examples of my program results. For example, William de Mandeville attests most of Richard's charters. Indeed, as Richard's chancellor, one expects him to be perennially present at the English court. When using my list generator program, de Mandeville shows up regularly as the only certain courtier present. This changes, of course, when Richard leaves England for the Second Crusade and also after de Mandeville's death in 1190.

The dates I chose to test my programs are between September 10, 1189, and September 20, 1189. This period encompasses the Great Council at Pipewell Abbey in Geddington. Most of activity in September takes place at this time. The council officially began on September 15, 1189, however, Richard I. and his courtiers began arriving in Geddington on September 10th. Since the court was stationary at this period, the comings and goings of the courtiers is more evident. With most courtiers coming after September 15th, my program which provides the hypothetical list illustrates the greatest changes.

On September 14, 1189, few of the surviving charters have witness lists. Only one witness, William de Mandeville, the king's chancellor, appears on this day. The day before, fortunately, has a witness list representing eight additional witnesses. The day after, September 15, 1189, the first day of the council, twelve witnesses attest. These lists only share six witnesses. Therefore, on September 14, 1189, we know that six courtiers were present. These witnesses were Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury; William de Mandeville, earl of Essex; Hugh, bishop of Lincoln; William Marshal; Ranulf de Glanville; and Robert of Wheatfield. All six of these men were important members of Richard's government. Baldwin and Hugh were among the ecclesiastical advisors to the king. De Mandeville was the Chancellor and chief-justiciar. William Marshal and Robert of Wheatfield were justiciars, Ranulf de Glanville was Henry II's justiciar and will accompany Richard on the Crusade. With these six men, there were others that usually accompanied them. When the archbishop of Canterbury was present, many other bishops would also be present, most notably Hugh, bishop of Durham, who was also a justiciar[^]?) Of the nineteen charters that Hugh, bishop of Lincoln attests, Baldwin of Canterbury also attests. This suggests that the bishop of Lincoln was required by his relationship with Baldwin to attest. The other attestors for this date are justiciars and therefore may act independently of each other. Their combined presence intimates a legitimizing effect to any charter they attest. As justiciars and important barons, it is conceivable that their allies among the other barons would be present.

September 18, 1189, was the day Richard I. moved from Geddington. On this date, the greatest number of courtiers would be leaving the court. Forty-six witnesses were present on the day before September 18th. Only

one witness was present on the day the next charters were issued, September 20, 1189. Twenty-seven witnesses were present on the eighteenth. These twenty-seven witnesses were the remaining witnesses from the council. This demonstrates that the courtiers attending the itinerant court of Richard I. were not constant when the court travelled. Core members of the court can then be demonstrated by examining the possible list for September 20, 1189. Only one witness, William de Mandeville, actually appears in any witness lists for this date. On September 18th, twenty-seven witnesses were present. On September 22, 1189, eleven witnesses were present. The witnesses shared by these lists were Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury; William de Mandeville; William Marshal; Robert of Wheatfield; John, bishop of Norwich; Gilbert, bishop of Rochester, and Walter, archbishop of Rouen. For a monarch preparing for the Crusade, this list is not surprising. It is expected that he would surround himself with his justiciars and chancellor to advise them of actions to take in his absence. It is also expected that a crusader would seek advice and absolution from the clergy.

While these lists cannot be definitive, they do attempt to fill in the gaps for the missing witness lists. However, these programs do demonstrate the changing construct of the court. In the early part of the reign Richard is mostly surrounded by ecclesiastics with several major barons controlling important government positions. The barons will eventually outnumber ecclesiastics at court as shown by the number of laymen attesting.

The importance of this research is to identify the persons in the royal court. The alliances and appearances are directly connected to the patronage system and the workings of the court. If the court members are known and appearance patterns are defined, then understanding how and why the the system worked is not far off.(4)

Notes

1. For my test case, I am using Richard I.'s charters that were issued during September 1189. Richard's charters were the first that had real time dates. This data was provided by Thomas Keefe, Professor of History at Appalachian State University. I was Dr. Keefe's Research Assistant and Computer Consultant while I attended ASU as a graduate student. I am grateful to Dr. Keefe for his support and encouragement while developing these programs and writing this paper.
2. The intersection of witness lists for Date, and Date,, where the difference in days is less than seven, is the witness list for the test date. For consecutive dates of charter attestations, such as those during the Council at Pipewell Abbey and others, my Datej and Date, sets may consist of the previous two days witness lists. This is to insure a greater

subset of possible witnesses. At present, only the witness lists for Richard I's September charters are available. There are few dates among these lists which are seven days apart. When further data is available, a new procedure will be added to my program for cases when the differences between Dates, and , are greater than seven, the hypothetical list is determined by the intersections of Date,, Date,, and witnesses which appear in 75% of the charters for thirty days closest to the test date.

3. Of the fifty-six charters that Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury attested, Hugh, bishop of Durham, attested thirty-four, William Marshal thirty-six.
4. Many scholars have tried to describe the patronage system by using Pipe Rolls which are more complete than the charters. My programs should corroborate theories that access to patronage was gained by attendance at the itinerant royal court. RICKPAT.PAS has been used by Dr. Keefe to compare groups of witnesses to charters with Pipe Roll entries for his paper »Counting Those Who Count: the Year 1189-1190 in Anglo-Norman History.«

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